PITTA

Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
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DECCAN BIRDERS EVENTS

In light of the Corona virus (COVID-19) epidemic, all Deccan Birders Field Trips and Indoor Meetings are on hold until further notice. Details of upcoming activities will be communicated once the situation improves.

We wish all our members a Merry Christmas and a Healthy and Happy New Year 2021

Report: Birds of Chincholi Wildlife Sanctuary, Karnataka

Text: Srikanth Bhamidipati; Photos: Anand Kalinadhabhatla

Common Woodshrike

Located about 140km from the city of Hyderabad lies Chincholi WLS, an amazing dry/moist deciduous forest. This forest borders the states of Telangana and Karnataka and has one major dam - Chandrampalli - and 4 smaller check dams. The forest is home to amazing biodiversity with more than 150 species of birds, 50-plus species of butterflies, and mammals like Indian Fox, Four-horned Antelope, Leopard and many others. Outside the sanctuary, there are farmlands and eucalyptus plantations and a small tribal settlement area with a population of about 50-100 people.

During our first visit to this location in 2011, we had entered from the Karnataka side and were amazed by the biodiversity of the location and the variety of sightings. It was not until late 2017, however, that we found out that there is a way in from the Telangana side as well, and that is when we started further exploring the place. In late 2019 and early 2020 this place became a hotspot for many birders with some very interesting sightings like Shaheen Falcon, Bonelli's Eagle, Fork-tailed Drongo Cuckoo and many other species, but the star of the show was undoubtedly the White-Bellied Minivet.

White-bellied Minivet male (L) and female (R)

During our regular visits to this site, we observed that some of these species, like the White-Bellied Minivet, Bonelli's Eagle and Shaheen Falcon, were nesting in this place, and we also got confirmed records of the Minivet breeding here. While looking for some older records of White-bellied Minivet with help from Humayun Taher, we were able to trace the existence of this species in Telangana to as far back as 1840, in the hills of Mannanur, and also found that nesting records with flock of 4-5 birds were recorded 25km north-west of Trimulgherry in the early 1900s, as mentioned in the Hyderabad State Ornithological Survey. This species now goes by the scientific name, *Pericroctotus erythropygius*, but in the early 1840s, it was called *Muscicapa erythropygius*, as recorded and published by TC Jerdon in the Madras Journal.

Similarly, Bonelli's Eagle and Shaheen Falcon were seen carrying nesting material close to the Chincholi sanctuary, and it was indeed a treat to the eyes to watch them fly by. Earlier this year, we had also observed many other species of birds nesting in this location, like Scaly-breasted Munia, Indian Silverbill, Black-rumped Flameback, White-browed Fantail, all the Prinias mentioned in the list, Plum-headed and Rose-ringed Parakeets, Grey Francolin and Jungle Bush Quail. There is great potential to find more species of birds here, as the habitat here is very diverse. We have seen dense forest landscapes, grasslands, a water body, scrub and other ecosystems which support the existence of many species.

Bonelli's Eagle

This year, I have visited this place around 4-5 times and seen more than 150 bird species, including 8 raptors and 3 owl species. A larger survey of this location across various seasons would definitely help evaluate and measure the potential of the location and gather substantial data which can be used for conservation purposes.

The land here is mainly forest area but around the periphery there is farming, very minimal fishing activity in the lake inside, and some recreational activities. In this context, we have observed some major threats to this location, including farming, cattle grazing, some amount of poaching, the presence of tourist population leading to uncontrolled littering and waste disposal and, above all, movie/television shootings. This is a major concern and, I feel, we must conduct organized surveys here to showcase the incredible biodiversity of the place and make sure that it is preserved and adequately protected.

Painted Spurfowl male (L) and female (R)

The list of birds seen during various visits to Chincholi WLS is given below:

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*	34	Asian Openbill	*Anastomus oscitans*
2	Painted Spurfowl	*Galloperdix lunulata*	35	Woolly-necked Stork	*Ciconia episcopus*
3	Rain Quail	*Coturnix coromandelica*	36	Painted Stork	*Mycteria leucocephala*
4	Jungle Bush Quail	*Perdicula asiatica*	37	Little Cormorant	*Microcarbo niger*
5	Painted Francolin	*Francolinus pictus*	38	Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*
6	Grey Francolin	*Francolinus pondicerianus*	39	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*
7	Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*	40	Great Egret	*Ardea alba*
8	Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*	41	Intermediate Egret	*Ardea intermedia*
9	Eurasian Collared Dove	*Streptopelia decaocto*	42	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*
10	Red Collared Dove	*Streptopelia tranquebarica*	43	Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus ibis*
11	Spotted Dove	*Streptopelia chinensis*	44	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*
12	Laughing Dove	*Streptopelia senegalensis*	45	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*
13	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	*Treron phoenicopterus*	46	Red-naped Ibis	*Pseudibis papillosa*
14	Greater Coucal	*Centropus sinensis*	47	Black-winged Kite	*Elanus caeruleus*
15	Blue-faced Malkoha	*Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*	48	Oriental Honey-buzzard	*Pernis ptilorhynchus*
16	Pied Cuckoo	*Clamator jacobinus*	49	Crested Serpent Eagle	*Spilornis cheela*
17	Asian Koel	*Eudynamys scolopaceus*	50	Short-toed Snake Eagle	*Circaetus gallicus*
18	Grey-bellied Cuckoo	*Cacomantis passerinus*	51	Changeable Hawk Eagle	*Nisaetus cirrhatus*
19	Fork-tailed Drongo Cuckoo	*Surniculus dicruroides*	52	Bonelli's Eagle	*Aquila fasciata*
20	Common Hawk Cuckoo	*Hierococcyx varius*	53	White-eyed Buzzard	*Butastur teesa*
21	Indian Nightjar	*Caprimulgus asiaticus*	54	Shikra	*Accipiter badius*
22	Little Swift	*Apus affinis*	55	Black Kite	*Milvus migrans*
23	Asian Palm Swift	*Cypsiurus balasiensis*	56	Jungle Owlet	*Glaucidium radiatum*
24	White-breasted Waterhen	*Amaurornis phoenicurus*	57	Spotted Owlet	*Athene brama*
25	Indian Thick-knee	*Burhinus indicus*	58	Barn Owl	*Tyto alba*
26	Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*	59	Eurasian Hoopoe	*Upupa epops*
27	Yellow-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus malabaricus*	60	Indian Grey Hornbill	*Ocyceros birostris*
28	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	61	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*
29	Little Ringed Plover	*Charadrius dubius*	62	Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*
30	Wood Sandpiper	*Tringa glareola*	63	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	*Merops philippinus*
31	Yellow-legged Buttonquail	*Turnix tanki*	64	Indian Roller	*Coracias benghalensis*
32	Barred Buttonquail	*Turnix suscitator*	65	Coppersmith Barbet	*Psilopogon haemacephalus*
33	River Tern	*Sterna aurantia*	66	Brown-headed Barbet	*Psilopogon zeylanicus*

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
67	Brown-capped Woodpecker	*Yungipicus nanus*	110	Red-rumped Swallow	*Cecropis daurica*
68	Yellow-crowned Woodpecker	*Leiopicus mahrattensis*	111	Streak-throated Swallow	*Petrochelidon fluvicola*
69	White-naped Woodpecker	*Chrysocolaptes festivus*	112	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*
70	Black-rumped Flameback	*Dinopium benghalense*	113	White-browed Bulbul	*Pycnonotus luteolus*
71	Eurasian Kestrel	*Falco tinnunculus*	114	Greenish Warbler	*Phylloscopus trochiloides*
72	Shaheen Falcon	*Falco peregrinus peregrinator*	115	Lesser Whitethroat	*Sylvia curruca*
73	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*	116	Yellow-eyed Babbler	*Chrysomma sinense*
74	Plum-headed Parakeet	*Psittacula cyanocephala*	117	Indian White-eye	*Zosterops palpebrosus*
75	White-bellied Minivet	*Pericrocotus erythropygius*	118	Tawny-bellied Babbler	*Dumetia hyperythra*
76	Small Minivet	*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*	119	Puff-throated Babbler	*Pellorneum ruficeps*
77	Large Cuckooshrike	*Coracina macei*	120	Large Grey Babbler	*Turdoides malcolmi*
78	Black-headed Cuckooshrike	*Lalage melanoptera*	121	Jungle Babbler	*Turdoides striata*
79	Indian Golden Oriole	*Oriolus kundoo*	122	Yellow-billed Babbler	*Turdoides affinis*
80	Black-hooded Oriole	*Oriolus xanthornus*	123	Asian Pied Starling	*Gracupica contra*
81	Ashy Woodswallow	*Artamus fuscus*	124	Brahminy Starling	*Sturnia pagodarum*
82	Common Woodshrike	*Tephrodornis pondicerianus*	125	Chestnut-tailed Starling	*Sturnia malabarica*
83	Common Iora	*Aegithina tiphia*	126	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*
84	Spot-breasted Fantail	*Rhipidura albogularis*	127	Orange-headed Thrush	*Geokichla citrina*
85	White-browed Fantail	*Rhipidura aureola*	128	Asian Brown Flycatcher	*Muscicapa dauurica*
86	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*	129	Indian Robin	*Copsychus fulicatus*
87	Ashy Drongo	*Dicrurus leucophaeus*	130	Oriental Magpie Robin	*Copsychus saularis*
88	White-bellied Drongo	*Dicrurus caerulescens*	131	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	*Cyornis tickelliae*
89	Black-naped Monarch	*Hypothymis azurea*	132	Black Redstart	*Phoenicurus ochruros*
90	Indian Paradise-flycatcher	*Terpsiphone paradisi*	133	Blue Rock Thrush	*Monticola solitarius*
91	Bay-backed Shrike	*Lanius vittatus*	134	Siberian Stonechat	*Saxicola maurus*
92	Long-tailed Shrike	*Lanius schach*	135	Pied Bushchat	*Saxicola caprata*
93	Rufous Treepie	*Dendrocitta vagabunda*	136	Thick-billed Flowerpecker	*Dicaeum agile*
94	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*	137	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*
95	Large-billed Crow	*Corvus macrorhynchos*	138	Purple-rumped Sunbird	*Leptocoma zeylonica*
96	Cinereous Tit	*Parus cinereus*	139	Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticus*
97	Rufous-tailed Lark	*Ammomanes phoenicura*	140	Streaked Weaver	*Ploceus manyar*
98	Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark	*Eremopterix griseus*	141	Baya Weaver	*Ploceus philippinus*
99	Jerdon's Bushlark	*Mirafra affinis*	142	Red Avadavat	*Amandava amandava*
100	Indian Bushlark	*Mirafra erythroptera*	143	Indian Silverbill	*Euodice malabarica*
101	Common Tailorbird	*Orthotomus sutorius*	144	Scaly-breasted Munia	*Lonchura punctulata*
102	Grey-breasted Prinia	*Prinia hodgsonii*	145	Tricolored Munia	*Lonchura malacca*
103	Jungle Prinia	*Prinia sylvatica*	146	House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*
104	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*	147	Yellow-throated Sparrow	*Gymnoris xanthocollis*
105	Plain Prinia	*Prinia inornata*	148	Grey Wagtail	*Motacilla cinerea*
106	Zitting Cisticola	*Cisticola juncidis*	149	White-browed Wagtail	*Motacilla maderaspatensis*
107	Dusky Crag Martin	*Ptyonoprogne concolor*	150	Richard's Pipit	*Anthus richardi*
108	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*	151	Paddyfield Pipit	*Anthus rufulus*
109	Wire-tailed Swallow	*Hirundo smithii*	152	Blyth's Pipit	*Anthus godlewskii*

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Trip Report: Blackbuck Resort, Bidar, Karnataka, November 17-19, 2020

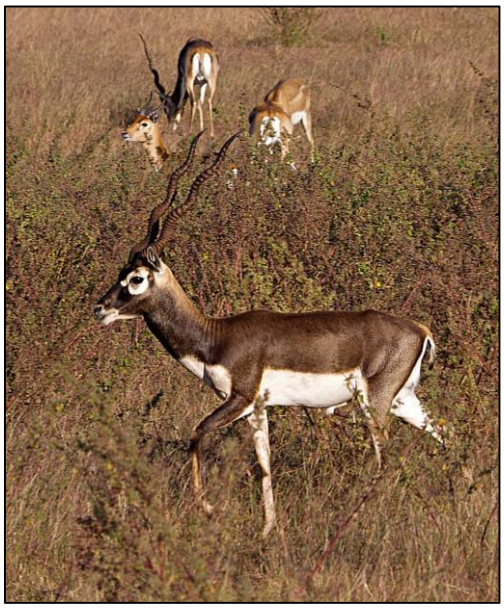
P Janardhan Reddy

After almost 8 months of limited movement due to COVID, four of us decided to visit the Blackbuck Resort near Bidar, operated by Jungle Lodges and Resorts. The resort is about 20km from Bidar, nestled in a lovely jungle on the shores of a small lake. The jungle was lush due to copious monsoon rains. Interestingly, the resort has a Sky Watcher telescope. We were able to view the craters on the moon in detail and also Saturn with its rings!

The distance to the resort is about 170km, and takes about 3-3.5 hours from Hyderabad. There is a bypass around Bidar. We used Google Maps to get us there.

Green Bee-eater (Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

We were under the impression that the blackbuck were in the reserve, but sadly, that was not the case. We found them around the outskirts of Bidar, about 45 minutes from the reserve, near the airport. However, their numbers have dwindled from a few hundred to about 60-70. Even in this area, they are under pressure from the growing city and it seems that in a few years, there won't be any habitat left for them unless they are shifted to a safe reserve.



Blackbuck (Photo: P Janardhan Reddy)

We made a couple of visits to the blackbuck area, once in the morning and once in the evening. The blackbuck are beautiful animals and we got to see quite a few. Adding to our delight were the Harriers, one Monitor Lizard and a Fox. Sadly, we saw the animals being hounded by feral dogs.

Pallid Harrier (Photo: P Janardhan Reddy)

Monitor Lizard (Photo: P Janardhan Reddy)

We did a couple of walks in the forest around the resort with a well-informed naturalist from the resort. We saw plenty of birds; a list is attached later in the report.

Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse (Photo: P Janardhan Reddy)

The food was sumptuous and tasty without being too spicy. The staff were well-trained, courteous and helpful. Due to the pandemic, cleanliness and distancing protocols were in place. The air-conditioned cottages were large and comfortable and many had individual balconies overlooking the lake.

A view of the resort from a coracle (Photo: Vikramdev Rao)

Woolly-necked Stork (Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

There are also coracles, paddle boats and canoes for anyone who would like to get out on the lake.

Little Grebe (Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

Another view from a coracle (Photo: Vikramdev Rao)

White-throated Kingfisher (Photo: P Janardhan Reddy)

All in all, it is a nice place to relax, watch birds and see the blackbuck.

The list of birds seen during the trip is given below:

Sl No	Common Name	Scientific name	Sl No	Common Name	Scientific name
1	Woolly-necked Stork	*Ciconia episcopus*	9	Shikra	*Accipiter badius*
2	Pallid Harrier	*Circus macrourus*	10	White-browed Bulbul	*Pycnonotus luteolus*
3	Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*	11	Indian Roller	*Coracias benghalensis*
4	Eurasian Collared Dove	*Streptopelia decaocto*	12	Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*
5	Common Hawk Cuckoo	*Hierococcyx varius*	13	Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse	*Pterocles exustus*
6	Blue Rock Thrush	*Monticola solitarius*	14	Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus ibis*
7	Brahminy Starling	*Sturnia pagodarum*	15	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*
8	Little Ringed Plover	*Charadrius dubius*			

Some other photos taken during the trip:

Little Ringed Plover (Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

Brahminy Starling (Photo: P Janardhan Reddy)

Green Bee-eater
(Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

Blue Rock Thrush
(Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

Common Hawk Cuckoo
(Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

White-browed Bulbul
(Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

Shikra (Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

Eurasian Collared Dove
(Photo: Jairamchander Pingle)

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

Darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*)

Darter (Bharatpur, December 13, 2019)

Order: Suliformes
Family: Anhingidae
Genus: *Anhinga*
Species: *A. melanogaster*
Size: 85-100 cm

Description & distribution: The Darter, also known as the Oriental Darter, is a large waterbird and one of only four members of the Anhingidae family, which consists of a single genus, Anhinga. The name Snakebird is also used to refer to whichever member of the genus is allopatric to the region, and is popularly used because of the distinctive neck, which looks like a snake when the Darter is swimming with the rest of its body submerged in the water. This resemblance to a snake is also seen, more infrequently, during their bonding displays, when the mating pair sometimes twist their necks around each other.

The Darter is largely black and brown in colour, with conspicuous silvery-grey streaking on its scapulars and upper wing coverts, a velvety brown neck and head with no external nostrils and a long whitish stripe extending down the side of the neck, paler creamy-white and mottled-black chin and throat, and a long, wedge-shaped tail. The bill is yellow, slender and dagger-like, with serrated edges, and the Darter frequently uses the bill to impale fish, its main prey. The legs are short, set far back on the body, and completely webbed. The sexes are alike, although the female may be a little larger and may show paler colours, especially on the neck and underparts. There is no eclipse plumage, but some of the bare parts may change colour during breeding season: the gular sac changes from yellow-pink to black, and the yellow or greenish-yellow facial skin turns turquoise. The irises, which are usually white with a yellow ring, may also change colour between yellow, red or brown, and the tarsi and toes become darker grey with yellow webbing. The Darter is monogamous.

The Darter is seen across Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and east across Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia. It inhabits tropical, sub-tropical and sometimes warm temperate regions, and prefers freshwater lakes, rivers, marshes, swamps and, less frequently, brackish estuaries, lagoons and mangroves; it is often seen perching on trees near or overlooking water.

Habitat & behaviour: The Darter is mostly resident and does not migrate, except for some local movements in response to climatic conditions or food scarcity. It is usually seen singly, in pairs or in small groups, but often associates with herons, storks and ibises. It is a colonial nester, but is still highly territorial when on the nest. While walking it shows a high-stepping gait, with wings spread for balance, while its flight is laboured, and so it prefers to get up high and then soar or glide on thermals. The usual call is a two-syllabled *chigi chigi chigi*, and it may emit a series of clicks or rattles while flying. When perched, adults communicate with croaks, grunts or rattles while young birds may emit squealing or squawking calls. Its diet consists mainly of mid-sized fish and, occasionally, aquatic vertebrates or invertebrates like molluscs, frogs, eels, water snakes, and even small turtles. It uses its sharp bill to impale its prey, then brings it out of the water and tosses it up in the air before swallowing it head-first.

Nesting: The Darter breeds generally between May and August in northern India, and between November and February in southern India. Egg laying seems to be related to water levels and usually happens when water levels are high, thus ensuring that abundant food resources are available. The nest is a twig platform, similar to other colonial nesters like the cormorants, storks and herons with whom the Darter associates while nesting in a mixed heronry, and generally near water. The usual clutch consists of 3-6 elongated, greenish-white or pale greenish-blue eggs.

Local name: The Darter is known as *'Panwa', 'Pan dubi'* or *'Banbe'* in Hindi, *'Bhujanga'* in Punjabi, *'Pamubatu'* in Telugu, *'Pambuttara'* in Tamil, *'Sarpagreeva'* in Gujarati and *'Sarpapakshi'* or *'Tirandaz'* in Marathi.

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Bird Humour

Umesh Mani

PEANUTS
By Charles M. Schulz
HERE'S THE FIERCE VULTURE SITTING ON A TREE LIMB WAITING FOR A VICTIM..
VULTURES NEVER SIT ON TREE LIMBS DURING A SNOW-STORM
I WONDERED ABOUT THAT
SCHULZ

(From The Times Of India, January 25, 2018)

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